

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 VIENTI 00125 161033Z

73

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CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 0125

BANGKOK ALSO FOR BRO

CINCPAC FOR POLAD AND CORCORAN

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SNAR, LA

SUBJECT: NARCOTICS SITUATION IN LAOS

REF: 75 BANGKOK 24606 (DTG 211051Z NOV 75) (NOTAL)

1. EMBOFF CALLED ON UNITED NATIONS FUND FOR DRUG ABUSE CONTROL (UNFDAC) REPRESENTATIVE ALEXANDRE ARNAUD ON JANUARY 16 FOR TOUR D'HORIZON ON NARCOTICS SITUATION IN LAOS. ARNAUD CONFIRMED INACCURACY OF SHIRT-TAIL PIECE BY JOHN EVERINGHAM, ATTACHED TO LONGER ARTICLE BY MICHAEL MORROW IN NOVEMBER 21 ISSUE OF "FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW", WHICH STATED THAT 1971 LAO NARCOTICS LAW HAD BEEN REPEALED. EARLIER IN 1975 THE LAO COMMUNISTS HAD INSPIRED A MOVE WITHIN THE NOW-DEFUNCT JOINT NATIONAL POLITICAL COUNCIL TO REPEAL THE 1971 LAW, BUT AFTER REPRESENTATIONS BY UNFDAC THE LAO AUTHORITIES HAD DECIDED TO LEAVE THE LAW ON THE BOOKS,
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 VIENTI 00125 161033Z

THOUGH IT IS NOT BEING ENFORCED. (FYI BANGKOK: FROM OUR

LIMITED EXPERIENCE WITH HIM, MORROW IS A PROFESSIONAL AND RELATIVELY RESPONSIBLE, BUT THE IDENTIFIED SOURCE OF HIS ARTICLE -- LYTECK LYNHIAVU OF MINISTRY OF INTERIOR -- IS A WOULD-BE HEIR TO VANG PAO AS LEADER OF THE MEO AND HAS BEEN ON AN ANTI-U.S. KICK FOR MANY MONTHS. IT IS UNFORTUNATE THAT MORROW PRESENTED LYTECK'S VIEWS SO UNCRITICALLY. EVERINGHAM IS A PHOTOGRAPHER TURNED "CORRESPONDENT" WHO IS NOTORIOUSLY BIASED AND OFTEN HIGHLY INACCURATE. WE CAN ONLY SUPPOSE THAT THE F.E.E.R. CONTINUES TO PUBLISH HIS DISPATCHES BECAUSE THERE IS LITERALLY NO OTHER NATIVE-SPEAKER OF ENGLISH NOW RESIDENT HERE AVAILABLE FOR OR INTERESTED IN THE WORK.)

2. ARNAUD SAID THAT THE LAO COMMUNISTS HAD MOVED BEYOND THEIR INITIAL NEGATIVE ATTITUDE AND NOW BELIEVED THAT A) THEY SHOULD BE IN CONFORMITY WITH INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONVENTIONS; B) CROP SUBSTITUTION WAS EFFICACIOUS; AND C) THERE WAS NO REAL MONEY IN LEGAL OPIUM PRODUCTION. THEY HAD, HOWEVER, PROMISED THE MEO AND THE YAO THAT THEY COULD GROW OPIUM. THE LAO COMMUNISTS FOR POLITICAL REASONS WOULD HAVE TO MOVE SLOWLY TO WEAN THESE TRIBES AWAY FROM THEIR OLD PRACTICES. NEVERTHELESS, ARNAUD CONSIDERED IT UNLIKELY THAT IN THE MEANTIME ANY SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF THE OPIUM THE TRIBESMEN PRODUCED WOULD ENTER THE INTERNATIONAL ILLEGAL DRUG MARKET.

3. THE LAO COMMUNISTS APPEARED GENUINELY TO WANT TO AVOID ILLEGAL NARCOTICS ACTIVITY. ACCORDING TO ARNAUD, THEY HAD FORMERLY BELIEVED THAT DRUG REGULATIONS WERE AN "IMPERIALIST" (AMERICAN) DEVICE, BUT WERE MUCH IMPRESSED BY THE FACT THAT THE SOVIET UNION SUBSCRIBED TO INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONVENTIONS AND GENERALLY SUPPORTED SUPPRESSION OF THE ILLEGAL DRUG TRADE.

4. ARNAUD SAID THAT SINCE THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF LAOS WAS JUST GETTING ORGANIZED, IT HAD GIVEN LITTLE THOUGHT TO THE NARCOTICS QUESTION. HE WAS, HOWEVER, MAINTAINING CONTACT WITH APPROPRIATE MINISTRIES AND HAD BEEN COURTEOUSLY RECEIVED BY THEM.

IT WAS HIS IMPRESSION THAT AS THINGS SETTLED DOWN THE UNFDAC
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 VIENTI 00125 161033Z

WOULD BE ABLE TO DO USEFUL WORK WITH THE PDRL AND THAT ILLEGAL NARCOTICS FROM LAOS WOULD NOT BE A SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM.

5. COMMENT: THE JUDICIAL STATUS OF THE 1971 LAW IS OF NO PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE. THERE ARE IN REALITY NO LAWS OR JUDICIAL PROCEDURES AT PRESENT IN THE PDRL. WHAT COUNTS ARE THE DECISIONS TAKEN BY OFFICIALS OF THE LAO PEOPLE'S

REVOLUTIONARY (COMMUNIST) PARTY. AT THE MOMENT, THEY FIND IT POLITICALLY EXPEDIENT TO ALLOW HILL TRIBESMEN TO GROW OPIUM. THEY ARE UNLIKELY, HOWEVER, TO WANT THE TRIBES TO ENGAGE PRIVATELY IN THE ILLEGAL NARCOTICS TRADE, GIVEN THE COMMUNISTS' DISTASTE FOR PRIVATE ENTERPRISE, AND THE PDRL IS UNLIKELY ITSELF TO ENGAGE IN THE ILLEGAL TRADE EITHER, GIVEN THE SOVIET ATTITUDE TOWARD NARCOTICS AND THE PDRL'S DESIRE TO APPEAR RESPECTABLE. IN ADDITION, UNLIKE ITS PREDECESSOR GOVERNMENTS, THE PDRL APPEARS TO BE ABLE TO ENFORCE ITS WILL. THIS SITUATION, COUPLED WITH THE WORK OF THE UNFDAC, SHOULD IN TIME CAUSE LAOS TO LOSE WHATEVER SIGNIFICANCE IT MAY STILL HAVE IN THE INTERNATIONAL DRUG SITUATION.

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